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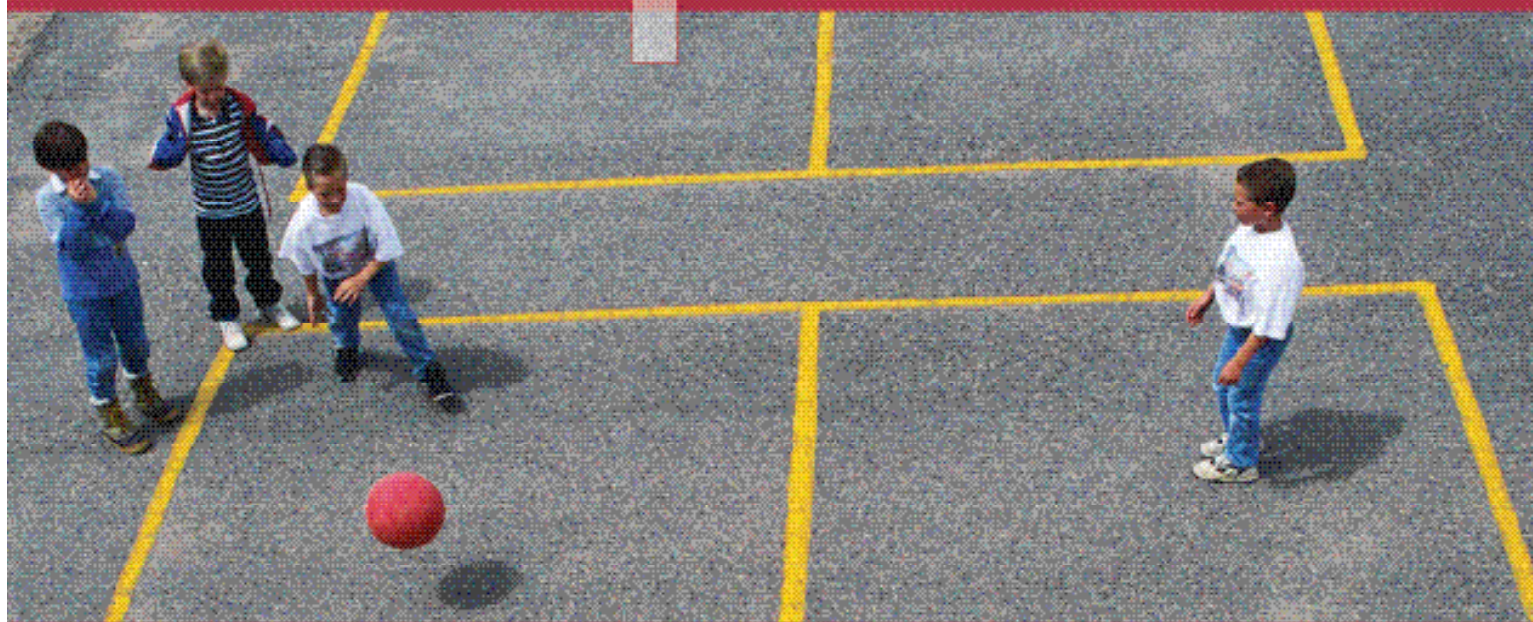
on Bullying & Harassment in Maryland Public Schools

Maryland State Department of Education
Division of Student and School Services
Student Services and Alternative Programs Branch

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in Maryland Public Schools

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Executive Summary

School safety has become an agenda item in discussions about public education in recent years. The fact remains, however, that schools are one of the safest places that America's youth have as a constant in their lives. Moreover, schools are sadly in some cases a safe haven from the turmoil, poverty, crime, and violence that are part of the everyday experience of some of America's youth. It is important to keep in mind that schools are part of the greater community in which they are just one institution, like faith communities, the family, and businesses. As such, schools are not insulated from the issues that affect the community. If there is violence in a community in which a school exists, then that violence is more than likely to have an effect on the school.

In order to address issues surrounding school safety, policymakers on the national and local levels have made efforts to ensure that schools remain safe and orderly environments conducive to learning. The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 includes school safety as a national educational goal. The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) has identified safe schools as one of its five strategic goals. Maryland's 24 local school systems (LSSs) have included school safety as one of the goals in their strategic five-year Bridge to Excellence Master Plans.

The fact remains that these efforts have not necessarily eradicated or decreased the incidences of bullying and harassment that occur in Maryland public schools. Anecdotal accounts suggest that bullying and harassment continue to plague the school day experiences of too many students. Thus, MSDE staff undertook a study of bullying and harassment. The *Report on Bullying and Harassment in Maryland Public Schools* has three major foci: it examines past and current efforts in Maryland to address bullying and harassment, it identifies gaps in current efforts to address the problem, and it identifies strategies and makes recommendations on how to effectively prevent and reduce bullying and harassment in Maryland public schools. The recommendations are framed for consideration by MSDE and the 24 LSSs.

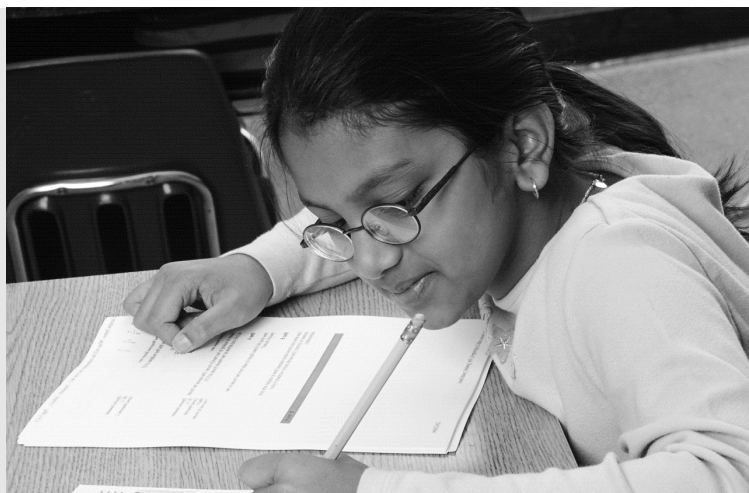## School **safety** has become an agenda item

Introduction

In the past two decades, behaviors historically considered "rites of passage" and "having a little fun" have emerged as threats to school safety and to the psychological and physical health of children.[1] These behaviors are now recognized as bullying and harassment and are more fully understood as detrimental to perpetrators, victims, and bystanders. As the National Crime Prevention Council has noted, "It is not external terrorism that worries our children, but what is happening in hallways, at lunch and recess, and going to and from school. This is the 'terrorist' threat that most frightens our teens and interferes with their education."[2]

The incidence rates of bullying and harassment are increasing in both numbers and severity in schools across the nation. The U.S. Department of Education (USDE), based on the results of a 1998 national survey funded by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, notes that bullying "affects nearly one in every three American schoolchildren in grades six through ten."[3] An annual survey sponsored by the National Crime Prevention Council found that "the proportion of those seeing bullying either several times a day or once a day rose from 37 percent in 2001 to 61 percent in 2002."[4] Harassment is even more prevalent: a 2001 national survey conducted by the American Association of American Women found that 83 percent of girls and 79 percent of boys have experienced harassment.[5]

There is no evidence to suggest that Maryland is any different from the rest of the country in the disturbing frequency of bullying and harassment. Although available data on the incidence of bullying and harassment are limited, they show that between the 2000-2001 school year and the 2003-2004 school year, the statewide rates of suspension and expulsion for harassment increased by 46 percent, and the rates for sexual harassment increased by 21 percent.[6] This rise may partially reflect more frequent reporting due to heightened awareness and education about the harmful effects of harassment and the importance of its reporting; however, it is most likely that such increased reporting merely brings the statistics more in line with the true amount of such behavior that has been occurring in schools. Unfortunately, these data only reflect the incidents that resulted in suspension or expulsion; events of bullying and harassment that were not reported by school administrators, or that did not result in suspension or expulsion, are not included in these data.

Concern about the well-being of Maryland's students, and the limited availability of statewide data on harassment and bullying, prompted the Maryland legislature to pass a law in 2005 establishing a uniform method for students and family members to report incidents of harassment and intimidation, and requiring LSSs to collect and report data on these incidents to the MSDE.[7]

One of the co-sponsors of the bill, Delegate Luiz Simmons (D-Montgomery County), has said that "bullying should not be a rite of passage. For a lot of people it's a rite of terror."[8]

This report provides information on MSDE's past and present efforts to assist LSSs in understanding, preventing, and addressing bullying and harassment of students.

This report does the following:
- Provides nationally recognized definitions for bullying and harassment;
- Tells why bullying and harassment are a problem for schools and students;
- Describes the extent of bullying and harassment in schools across the nation and in Maryland;
- Provides information on what is being done at the national level, in other states, and in Maryland to prevent and reduce bullying and harassment in schools;
- Tells what research and the experts say are the most effective strategies to prevent and reduce bullying and harassment in schools;
- Offers recommendations on additional actions that need to be taken to effectively address bullying and harassment in Maryland public schools; and
- Provides documentation to support the information contained in the report.

Unfortunately, many school personnel still lack the awareness and knowledge necessary to adequately address the persistent problems of bullying and harassment. The National Association of School Psychologists reports that "25 percent of teachers see nothing wrong with bullying or putdowns and consequently intervene in only 4 percent of bullying incidents."[9] It is hoped that this report can be a tool for our continuing project of building safe schools for our youth.

...bullying is **not** a rite of passage

What is Bullying and What is Harassment?

A student is *bullied* when he or she is exposed repeatedly and over time to intentional negative actions on the part of one or more students, and whose ability to participate in and benefit from the school's educational programs or activities is adversely affected.[10] Bullying causes harm from repeated negative conduct in a relationship with an imbalance of power. Bullying refers to conduct that:

■ Adversely affects a student's ability to participate in or benefit from the school's educational programs or activities;

■ Is a result of repeated negative actions (intentional, aggressive behavior) by one or more other students over time; and

■ Occurs in a relationship in which there is an imbalance of power.

The *Maryland Student Records System Manual* defines bullying as "intentional negative actions on the part of one or more students, repeatedly and over time, that interfere with a student's ability to participate in or benefit from the school's education programs."[11]

A student is *harassed* when he or she experiences conduct that:

■ Adversely affects his or her ability to participate in or benefit from the school's educational programs or activities because it is so severe, pervasive, or objectively offensive; and

■ Is based upon his or her actual or perceived identity with regard to race, color, national origin, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religion, or other identifying characteristics.

The *Maryland Student Records System Manual* defines harassment as "intentional negative actions on the part of one or more students that cause discomfort with identity issues in regard to race, color, national origin, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religion, or other identifying characteristics, and that interfere with a student's ability to participate in or benefit from the school's educational programs." Sexual harassment is defined as "unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and/or other inappropriate verbal, written, or physical conduct of a sexual nature, directed toward others."[12]

It is important to recognize the spectrum of behaviors that can be considered bullying and harassment. Direct bullying and harassment include behaviors that are physical (hitting, kicking), verbal (name calling, teasing), non-verbal (rejecting, defaming, terrorizing), and sexual (voyeurism, assault). Indirect bullying and harassment include behaviors that are physical (getting another person to assault someone), verbal (spreading rumors, gossip), and non-verbal (deliberate exclusion from a group).

Another vehicle for bullying that is becoming increasingly popular by which male and female students bully others is *cyber-bullying*. Cyber-bullying is harassing, humiliating, intimidating or threatening others on the Internet or via cell phones and other technology available to youth (e.g. e-mails, Web pages, instant messaging, and other electronically communicated messages).

It is also important to recognize that both boys and girls can be perpetrators and victims of bullying and harassment. The National Crime Prevention Council reported that the gender gap in bullying has nearly closed: while in 2001, the proportion of boys who witnessed bullying at least once a day was 44 percent and that of girls was 31 percent, in 2002 the proportions were nearly equal (61 percent and 60 percent, respectively).[13] Research supports gender differences in how boys and girls bully. When boys bully, it is often overt, and sometimes physical. Female bullying is often seen as a "game" girls play to make the target disliked, shunned, and excluded. Boys typically target acquaintances or strangers, while girls target friends and others in the same circle. Female bullying is harder to identify and more difficult to escape, which, in turn, causes more painful, longer lasting effects. Two books regarding female bullying, *Queen Bees and Wannabes: Helping Your Daughter Survive Cliques, Gossip, Boyfriends, and Other Realities of Adolescence*, by Rosalind Wiseman, and *Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls*, by Rachel Simmons, have led to a recent increase in awareness about these problems.[14]

How Do Bullying and Harassment Adversely Affect Students, Schools and Society?

Bullying and harassment directly impact schools and students (perpetrators, victims, and bystanders) in a variety of ways. Bullying and harassment adversely affect student learning and contribute to more violence in schools and beyond. The "academic consequences of bullying include decreased interest in school, increased absences, and decreased concentration levels for students. Bystanders are also affected by bullying. Many lack a sense of mental and physical well-being."[15] The medical effects of bullying can include vomiting, hyperventilation, headaches, paralysis, and fatigue states, and psychological disorders including anxiety and depression.[16] Long-term effects associated with bullies include antisocial behaviors such as vandalism, shoplifting, truancy, and frequent drug use.[17] In more than two-thirds of the 37 school shootings since 1974, the attackers felt persecuted, bullied, or threatened by their peers.[17] A larger, more encompassing problem for society comes from the statistic that by age 24, 60 percent of former bullies have been convicted of a crime.[18]

Society is learning that little schoolhouse bullies grow into big bullies. The crimes become larger, and the effect becomes more devastating.

Additionally, local boards of education may be held liable for failing to act appropriately when students and parents/guardians report incidents of bullying and harassment. In a recent decision rendered in *Davis v. Monroe County Board of Education*, 526 U.S. 629 (1999), the Supreme Court of the United States found for the petitioner and against the board of education in a case of peer-on-peer harassment that repeatedly occurred on school property in which school personnel were informed of the harassment and did not act to stop the harassment. In this case, the court found that the school system was liable for damages due to acting with deliberate indifference to known acts of harassment in its programs or activities and that the harassment was so severe, pervasive and objectively offensive that it barred the victim access to an educational opportunity or benefit.
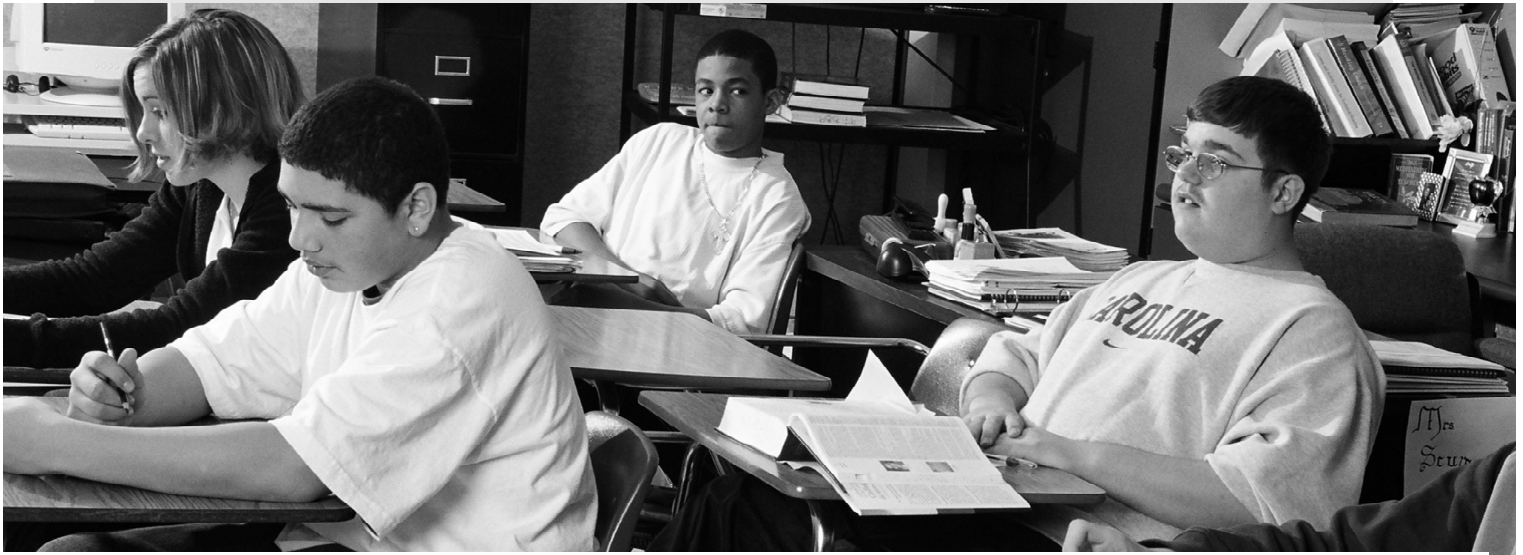
What is the Extent of Bullying and Harassment in Schools Across the Nation?

An unfortunate reality in our schools today is that incidents of bullying and harassment are all too frequent. A 1998 survey of a nationally representative sample of middle- and high-school aged youth, funded by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, involved analysis of over 15,000 student responses in U.S. public and private schools.[20] It found that almost 30 percent of students had, during the spring 1998 semester, "sometimes" or "weekly" bullied others (13 percent), been bullied (10.6 percent), or both. An additional quarter of the students had been involved in bullying "once or twice" that semester (25 percent as bullies, 24.2 percent as targets). This means that over 5.7 million youth nationwide are estimated to be involved in moderate or frequent bullying. These incident rates accumulate over the course of a young lifetime: according to a 1999 survey by the National Crime Prevention Council in Washington, D.C., as many as 75 percent of students are victimized by bullies during their entire school career.[21]

Harassment is even more common, and is experienced by both boys and girls. Eighty-three percent of girls and 79 percent of boys report having experienced harassment. Both physical and non-physical harassment are common: 76 percent of students have experienced non-physical harassment while 58 percent have experienced physical harassment. Over one-third of students who have been harassed report that they first experienced it in elementary school.[22]

The prevalence of bullying and harassment combines with their negative medical, psychological, and academic effects to have a devastating impact on students, schools, and society. "Tens of thousands of students are still afraid to go to school because of teasing, harassment, and intimidation from other students."[23] Fifty-four percent of 8-11 year olds and 40 percent of 12-15 year olds want more information on how to handle being bullied or teased.[24]

What is the Extent of Bullying and Harassment in Maryland's Public Schools?

The *Suspensions, Expulsions, and Health-Related Exclusions Report (SEHER),* published annually by MSDE, is the only statewide data source that provides some information about the extent of bullying and harassment in Maryland public schools. The *SEHER* provides data on the number of students who are suspended or expelled each school year for a variety of offenses. The fact that this report only provides data on suspensions and expulsions limits its usefulness in assessing the extent of bullying and harassment in the State. The *SEHER* provides data on suspensions and expulsions for two categories of harassment as follows:

- Sexual Harassment: Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and/or other inappropriate verbal, written, or physical conduct of a sexual nature directed towards others; and
- Harassment: Unwanted and inappropriate verbal, written or physical conduct, other than sexual harassment, directed towards others.

The instructions for reporting suspensions and expulsions require that bullying be coded as harassment, extortion, or physical attack, depending on the circumstances of the behavior; therefore, no conclusion as to the extent of bullying in the State can be drawn from the report. Similarly, the instructions also require that hazing and stalking be coded as harassment, verbal/physical threat, physical attack, or extortion, as appropriate; therefore, no conclusion as to the extent of harassment in the State can be drawn from the report. An analysis of suspensions and expulsions for harassment and sexual harassment revealed the following:

- There is a great degree of disparity across the State in reporting suspensions and expulsions for harassment and sexual harassment. For example, the School Year (SY) 2003-04 *SEHER* shows that of the 19,985 suspensions and expulsions reported by one LSS, none were for harassment. In another LSS, 806 of the 22,179 suspensions and expulsions reported were for harassment. The SY 2003-04 *SEHER* shows the same degree of disparity in reporting for sexual harassment, which ranged from zero out of 22,179 suspensions and expulsions in one LSS to 205 out of 8,364 suspensions and expulsions in another LSS;

- The number of suspensions and expulsions for harassment increased by 46 percent (from 1,291 in SY 2000-01 to 1,886 in SY 2003-04);

- The number of suspensions and expulsions for sexual harassment increased by 21 percent (from 955 in SY 2000-01 to 1,157 in SY 2003-04); and

- In 2003–04, the majority of the students suspended or expelled for both harassment and sexual harassment were in grades six, seven, and eight (middle school).

Anecdotally, the number of letters and calls received by the Governor, State and local legislators, and the State Superintendent of Schools indicates that the public believes bullying and harassment are a problem in Maryland public schools. However, there is no method available to help determine the number of calls and letters received by these officials.

Based on the above information, an accurate assessment of the extent of bullying and harassment in Maryland public schools could not be determined. However, the steady increase in the number of suspensions and expulsions for harassment and sexual harassment from SY 2000-01 to SY 2003-04 is a good indicator that bullying and harassment are a problem in Maryland's public schools.

What Is Being Done to Address Bullying and Harassment in Schools?

National organizations, federal agencies, and universities have put extensive efforts into developing and evaluating bullying and harassment prevention programs. Their efforts have resulted in the implementation of a system by which prevention programs are rated as model, promising, and effective so that state education agencies and local school systems can easily identify evidenced based programs that address bullying and harassment. In addition to these efforts, many states have passed legislation or provided regulatory guidance on what schools should do to prevent harassment and bullying.

National Efforts

Certain federal laws address particular kinds of harassment, but federal legislation does not prohibit *all* kinds of harassment in schools. Similarly, no federal legislation specifically prohibits bullying in schools. Current federal laws prohibit harassment based on:

- Race, color and national origin (see Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and "Racial Incidents and Harassment Against Students at Educational Institutions: Investigative Guidance: Notice," 59 Fed. Reg. 11448, dated March 10, 1994);
- Sex (see Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, 20 U.S.C. §1681 et seq. and "Revised Sexual Harassment Guidance: Harassment of Students by School Employees, Other Students, or Third Parties," 66 Fed. Reg. 5512, dated January 19, 2001); and
- Disability (see Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 U.S.C. §794; Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, 42 U.S.C. §12134; and "Dear Colleague Letter" from U.S. Department of Education, dated July 25, 2000).

No federal legislation specifically prohibits bullying in schools. The enforcement of non-discrimination laws (cited previously), however, may reach certain conduct that may also be characterized as bullying. Without specifically proscribing bullying or harassment, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 does:

- Permit states to spend specified amounts on training, technical assistance, and demonstration projects to address violence that is associated with prejudice and intolerance; and
- Condition certain funding to school districts upon their written assurance that they (or the schools to be served) have a plan for keeping schools safe and drug-free that includes "a code of conduct policy for all students that clearly states the responsibilities of students, teachers and administrators in maintaining a classroom environment that," among other things, "allows all students in the class to learn" and "has consequences that are fair and developmentally appropriate."

Efforts by Other States

Many states have taken legislative action to stop bullying, harassment, and hate crimes. Most of the legislative responses require the department of education, school districts, and school boards to develop policies and procedures to prevent bullying. Most of the state laws cover bullying that occurs in school, on school grounds and at school-sponsored activities.

Unfortunately, there is no national mandated and uniform school crime reporting to help schools assess issues and concerns. Only a little more than a dozen states now require crime reporting in grades K-12. The National Conference of State Legislatures has compiled a list of state actions that

relate to bullying, harassment, and hate crimes. States that have passed formal laws on bullying include California, Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Mississippi, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Oklahoma, Oregon, Vermont, Washington, and West Virginia.

Maryland's Efforts

Maintaining safe schools throughout Maryland is one of the highest priorities of the Ehrlich Administration and MSDE. In fact, the MSDE has taken significant steps in recent years to reach that goal, through a combination of policy decisions, regulations, data collection and technical assistance.

Regulations

In 1999, the Maryland State Board of Education (MSBE) promulgated COMAR 13A.01.04.03, School Safety, in the interest of creating and maintaining safe learning environments. The regulation clearly establishes the State's policy that "All students in Maryland's public schools have the right to educational environments that are: A. Safe; B. Appropriate for academic achievement; and C. Free from any form of harassment." MSDE has taken significant actions to enforce this regulation. MSDE conducted meetings and discussions with local school systems to implement the school safety regulations and to examine past and current efforts to address bullying and harassment; identify gaps in current efforts to address the problem; and identify strategies; and make recommendations on how to effectively prevent/reduce bullying and harassment in Maryland public schools.

In July 2003, MSBE repealed COMAR 13A.05.05.01 and adopted COMAR 13A.01.04, *School Safety,* to add a list of identifying characteristics for which students may be bullied and harassed. The new regulation states, "All students in Maryland's public schools, without exception and regardless of race, ethnicity, region, religion, gender, sexual orientation, language, socioeconomic status, age, or disability, have the right to educational environments that are: A. Safe; B. Appropriate for academic achievement; and C. Free from any form of harassment."

Additionally, the regulation was moved from the *Education That is Multicultural* chapter of COMAR to the *Public School Standards* chapter, acknowledging that bullying and harassment have a direct impact on school safety, and that creating and maintaining a safe learning environment are a priority for all schools.

Section 4114(d)(2)(7) of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 requires each LSS receiving funds under the Act to have a plan for keeping schools safe and drug-free that includes:

(A) appropriate and effective school discipline policies that prohibit disorderly conduct, the illegal possession of weapons, and the illegal use, possession, distribution, and sale of tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs by students;

(B) security procedures at school and while students are on the way to and from school;

(C) prevention activities that are designed to create and maintain safe, disciplined, and drug-free environments;

(D) a crisis management plan for responding to violent or traumatic incidents on school grounds; and

(E) a code of conduct policy for all students that clearly states the responsibilities of students, teachers, and administrators in maintaining a classroom environment that—
  (i) allows a teacher to communicate effectively with all students in the class;
  (ii) allows all students in the class to learn;
  (iii) has consequences that are fair, and developmentally appropriate;
  (iv) considers the student and the circumstances of the situation; and
  (v) is enforced accordingly.

Data Collection

An important component of statewide efforts is the collection of data, so that a clear picture of the situation can be attained. MSDE currently requires that all incidents resulting in suspensions/expulsions be reported to MSDE. This data is compiled in the annual *Suspensions, Expulsions, and Health-Related Exclusions Report*. Incidents of harassment and sexual harassment are coded to allow consistent reporting and tracking of these data. Effective for the 2005-2006 school year, the *Maryland Student Records System Manual 2006* includes a new category for incidents of bullying, enabling a clearer and more consistent picture of these incidents statewide.

Health Education Curriculum

In 2004, MSDE developed a Voluntary State Curriculum (VSC) to align the Maryland Content Standards and the Maryland School Assessment Program. The VSC identifies what students in grades pre-K through 8 should know and be able to do and includes a specific curriculum for harassment and assault prevention. In addition, the high-school VSC, to be implemented in fall 2005, defines what students should know and be able to do and includes the following indicator statements:

- ◼ "Identify teasing and bullying as harassment and their effects on the individual."
- ◼ "Identify harassment as a form of violence."
- ◼ "Recognize various forms of harassment and intimidating behaviors."
- ◼ "Recognize contributors to harassment and intimidating behaviors."

Further, in fall 2005, Maryland will pilot the Health Education Assessment Project (HEAP), which includes bullying and harassment indicators. The HEAP will give State and local health educators valuable data about the quality and retention of information about bullying and harassment prevention among students.

Sexual Assault/Harassment Prevention Grant

MSDE receives funding from the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) to implement school-based violence prevention programs, which include anti-bullying and harassment goals and objectives. MSDE currently receives $240,000 from DHMH to implement bullying and harassment prevention activities based on the Centers for Disease Control guidelines. Twelve LSSs successfully applied for and receive approximately $15,000 a year to implement programs to reduce sexual assault and harassment. The next opportunity for grants will be in August, 2006.

The focus of the project is to reduce the number of incidents of harassment and assault among the youth in Maryland by continuing to expand upon a sexual assault/harassment prevention program. The program does not stand alone, but is integrated within the health education, coordinated pupil services, and *Education That Is Multicultural* programs in the LSSs.

Other Programs and Activities

A variety of schoolwide, research-based programs (e.g., character education, *Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, Bully-Proofing Your School,* and *Second Step*) have been implemented in Maryland to create safe schools. Many of these programs have been effective in reducing classroom disruptions and office referrals and improving school climate.

What is Needed to Effectively Address Bullying and Harassment in Schools?

Educators agree about the power of prevention when addressing bullying and harassment. Research and experience indicate that comprehensive and proactive efforts are more likely to be effective in preventing incidents of bullying and harassment. Steps can be taken on the front end to raise the consciousness of the school community and to educate teachers, staff, parents and students regarding the nature of the issue, as well as effective responses.

- "The prevalence of bullying found in recent studies highlights the importance of efforts to p revent and reduce bullying in America's schools." (USDE)
- "Research and experience suggest that comprehensive efforts that involve teachers and other school staff, students, parents, and community members are likely to be more effective than purely classroom-based approaches." (USDE)
- Effective anti-bullying programs "require strong leadership and an ongoing commitment from school personnel." (USDE)
- "Staff development and training are essential to sustain [effective anti-bullying] programs." (USDE, National Association of State Boards of Education)

Research and experience suggest a comprehensive approach that involves administrators, teachers and other school staff, students, and parents who are concerned about school violence and bullying are more likely to be successful than those based solely in the classroom. A comprehensive approach includes clearly worded policies and stated codes of behavior with consistent and supportive follow-through.

More than ten years ago, Harvard University convened international experts on school violence and bullying to study prevention strategies. Sponsored by the National School Safety Center and the Federal Office of Juvenile Justice, Delinquency and Prevention, the practicum included prominent researchers, mental health professionals, and school and law enforcement personnel. This effort resulted in the development of a list of services, strategies, and suggested training classes for addressing bullying. It also led to the recommendation that schools provide:

- Rules against bullying that are publicized, posted schoolwide, and accompanied by consistent sanctions;
- Student and adult mentors who assist victims to build self-esteem and to foster mutual understanding of and appreciation for differences in others;
- A "buddy system" that pairs students with a particular friend or an older student who is aware of the buddy's class schedule and is available if help is needed;
- An on-campus parents' center to recruit parents to participate in the educational process, volunteer, and assist in school projects and activities;
- Parenting and anger management classes for adults;
- Behavior contracts signed by students and parents, and written behavior codes for students, teachers, and staff members;
- Discipline policies that emphasize positive behaviors rather than punishments for wrong behaviors;
- Training for all adult supervisors in cafeterias, playgrounds, or other "hot spots" where bullying is known to occur; and
- Classroom and schoolwide activities designed

to build self-esteem (for those who are bullied) by spotlighting special talents, hobbies, interests, and abilities of all students.

All staff at a school should be aware of what steps are necessary to help prevent and stop bullying. As a first step, school staff should be aware of the purposes bullying may serve for the children who bully. These include:

- Attention, recognition, prestige, or acceptance in a peer group;
- Access to an activity or item. Some students use bullying as an excuse to get what they want (e.g., extortion, intimidation); and
- A lack of understanding of social, cultural, psychological, or physical differences.

A safe school is the result of careful planning and research, and a thorough understanding of the school's environment and community is critical to its success. Many schools have found it helpful to begin by creating an anti-bullying planning worksheet to make sure all avenues have been considered. This multi-system approach sends a clear and consistent message to bullies and victims alike that bullies are not in charge and that all children deserve to be safe.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence have identified The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, created by Dan Olweus, as a model program. The program is also recognized by USDE. The core elements for school-level interventions in this program include:

- Assessing school needs and goals by using an anonymous questionnaire to poll the student body on the nature and extent of bullying problems.
- Forming a bullying prevention coordinating committee.
- Providing in-service days for teachers to review findings of the questionnaire, discuss the problem, and plan the prevention efforts.
- Holding schoolwide events to launch the program and incorporating anti-bullying themes and activities into the curriculum.
- Increasing supervision in areas that are known "hotspots" for bullying, including the cafeteria and playground.
- Developing schoolwide rules and consistent consequences for violations against bullying.

- Developing a system to reinforce positive behaviors.
- Holding staff discussion groups to enhance understanding and motivation.
- Involving parents in school activities and making sure parents and schools are aware of available resources in the community.
- Providing class-level interventions (e.g., class meetings about bullying) and individual-level interventions.

In addition to the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, the following scientifically based researched programs have proved to be very effective in addressing bullying and harassment. These programs have been implemented in LSSs across the State.

- **Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS):** An application of a behaviorally-based systems approach to enhance the capacity of schools, families, and communities to design effective environments that improve the fit or link between research-validated practices and the environments in which teaching and learning occur. Attention is focused on creating and sustaining primary (schoolwide), secondary (classroom), and tertiary (individual) systems of support that improve lifestyle results (personal, health, social, family, work, recreation) for all children and youth by making problem behavior less effective, efficient, and relevant, and desired behavior more functional.

- **Second Step:** The curriculum ranges from preschool through grade 9, and teaches the same skills units at all ages: empathy, impulse control, problem solving, and anger management. The goal is to change attitudes and behaviors in order to reduce impulsive and aggressive behavior in children and increase social competence. Second Step provides opportunities for modeling, practice, and reinforcement of the new skills at all grade levels.

- **Bully-Proofing Your School**: Designed for students K-6, focuses on mobilizing bystanders and includes conflict resolution training, social skills for victims, leadership training for bullies, and has pages that may be copied and distributed.

- **Bully-Proofing Your Middle School**: Designed for students in grades 6-8. It includes lessons and programs for teachers, parents, and bus drivers. Themes include creating a positive climate, telling the difference between bullying and disagreements, supporting victims, and avoiding power struggles.

- **Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS):** The developmentally-based curriculum is designed for K-grade 5 to promote social and emotional competence and to prevent or reduce behavior and emotional problems. The focus is emotional literacy, positive peer relations, and problem solving. Domains covered include self-control, emotional understanding, positive self-esteem, relationships, and interpersonal problem-solving skills.

Recommendations

Maryland has taken significant steps and made considerable progress in its efforts to create and maintain educational environments that are safe, appropriate for academic achievement, and free from all forms of harassment. However, a review of the research and best practices on bullying and harassment shows that a dditional strategies must be implemented to ensure that LSSs and schools have a continuum of prevention and intervention programs and policies to prevent/reduce bullying and harassment. The following recommendations are offered to fill the gaps identified in the State's continuum of programs and policies to address bullying and harassment in schools.

Maryland State Department of Education

- Provide definitions for bullying, harassment, and sexual harassment that can be used uniformly throughout the State. An effort should be made to ensure the definitions are compatible with those used nationally. This will enable Maryland to compare its data with national data and will facilitate more accurate reporting of these offenses by LSSs and schools.
- Establish separate discipline codes for bullying, harassment, and sexual harassment to ensure accuracy and uniformity in reporting suspensions/expulsions for these offenses by LSSs and schools.
- Assist LSSs in developing an instrument to assess the extent of bullying and harassment in schools. The instrument should allow for input f rom students, staff, and parents/guardians regarding the extent of bullying and harassment and the school's response to allegations of bullying and harassment.
- At a minimum, provide a full-time professional position to assist LSSs with improving school safety. The duties of this position should include responding to parent/guardian concerns, data collection and analysis, and providing technical assistance and support to LSSs to include information on scientifically based researched programs and strategies that prevent/reduce bullying and harassment.
- Designate an MSDE point of contact for matters pertaining to bullying and harassment and provide technical assistance and support to LSSs and schools in their efforts to prevent/reduce bullying and harassment.

Local School Systems

- Develop a process that will permit students, parents/guardians, and school staff to report incidents of bullying and harassment to a designated school or central office administrator. All reports should be documented and contain pertinent identifying data to include the school's response to the allegation.
- Provide training for all school staff on an ongoing basis that specifically addresses bullying and harassment and is aligned with the MSDE standards for professional development. The training must have measurable outcomes and an evaluation component (e.g., pre-and post-testing of staff, follow-up to ensure the LSS and school policies and procedures are being implemented in schools, etc.) The training should include gender differences and cyber-bullying.
- D evelop and disseminate written LSS and school policies that prohibit bullying and harassment. At a minimum, the policy should:
- Set forth the LSS's and school's commitment to protect students from bullying and harassment and other forms of violence and to maintain a nondiscriminatory environment;
- Identify the types of bullying and harassment prohibited by the policy and give examples;

- Require staff to report incidents of bullying and harassment that they learn about;
- Explain how to report bullying and harassment and to whom to report it;
- Describe the various steps the school will take to respond to reported incidents;
- Include formal complaint procedures;
- Prohibit retaliation against persons who report bullying and harassment or participate in related proceedings; and
- Provide strong consequences for staff members who do not respond quickly and decisively to incidents and allegations of bullying and harassment.

- Develop and implement a process to identify habitual offenders and provide screening to determine if mental health assistance is needed.

These recommendations should be implemented to supplement and not replace the variety of schoolwide research-based programs (e.g., character education, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, Bully-Proofing Your School, and Second Step) currently being used in Maryland to create and maintain safe schools. When fully implemented, these recommendations should serve to fill the gaps identified in the continuum of programs and policies to prevent/reduce bullying and harassment in Maryland's public schools.

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